

## DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

### CBCS SEM 3, CC6

#### Tintin In Tibet as Graphic Novel

A graphic novel or a comic novel is a book that tells a self-contained story in comics form. Just like any other novel, a graphic novel has an introduction, a main part where action happens and a culmination. Unlike comic periodicals, which do not tell the whole story in one go, a graphic novel tells a complete story. The term 'graphic novel' was first used by Richard Kyle in an article. Later DC Comics started using the term in 1970s. In 1980s, Marvel too started bringing out lengthy, self-sufficient comics and termed them graphic novel. The term 'graphic novel' is used to attach a tag of seriousness to the comics form which are generally regarded as children's entertainment.

There are many features of a graphic novel that sets it apart from comics. A comic book uses a saddle stitch, whereas a comic novel looks like a traditional book with soft paper cover or hardback cover having its spine held together by glue. Unlike comic books, a graphic novel ends in one book and one does not have to wait for any new issue. Since a graphic novel has ample amount of pages to tell the story, it does not focus on action alone but delves deeper into the inner workings of the characters' mind. The story, too, is made complex with subplot and details.

Now, armed with this knowledge, let us examine if Tintin in Tibet can be called a graphic novel. Herge's Tintin In Tibet was first published in a serialized form from September 1958 to November 1960. Hence in its original form, it cannot be called a graphic novel. However, it was published as a book in 1960 following its encouraging reception. Structurally, the 1960 edition can be called a graphic novel. It is 64 page book with both hardcover and paperback editions in circulation. The book starts with Tintin holidaying in a resort in the French Alps along with Captain Haddock, Professor Calculus and Snowy. He gets a vision where he sees his friend Chang uttering his name for help. Later, after reading about a plane crash in the Himalayas and getting a letter from Chang, Tintin realizes that Chang is indeed in danger as he was in that plane. Tintin rushes to help his friend and atlast with the help of monks and local sherpas, he manages to rescue his friend. The book is wholesome. The story is complete and has an introduction, main action and culmination. Hence, from a cursory reading we can say Tintin In Tibet is a graphic novel. But there is more to unravel.

In other Tintin works like Tintin In America, or Tintin In Congo or any other Tintin comics, there are villains, criminals, actions in the story. The action in these comics is steered by Tintin's fight with the criminals. However, in Tintin In Tibet, there is no criminal. What Tintin fights is his own fear, hesitations and the cruel environment. This makes Tintin In Tibet a distinguished story. The plot, thus, involves introspection, faith, power of friendship, death and even spirituality. With the detailed news report in front of Tintin, he has every reason to conclude that Chang is no more. Yet, he sees an eerie dream where his friend is calling him. This was enough for Tintin to go and rescue Chang. Here, we also see the love that Captain Haddock has for Tintin that compels him to go with him. The plot, therefore, cannot be discarded as a children's story. Herge's depiction of Yeti, too, makes it an endearing character which is the exact opposite of the common narrative that Yeti is a dangerous creature. The depiction of loneliness is poignantly pictured when the Yeti watches Chang leave its den and it remains alone. The depiction of

Snowy is handled with skill. The fact that both good and bad are inside us is pictured nicely when Snowy goes to alert the monks in the monastery. In the path, he sees a bone and gets into the dilemma of whether to chew it or go to the monks.

The idea of extra-sensory perception is dabbled with too. One of the monks in the monastery sees Tintin and his group in his vision. Later when Snowy comes to the monastery, he is identified as the dog that monk saw in his dream. The monastery episode also serves to show the unwavering faith that Tintin has, even when the monks are not so hopeful about the well-being of Chang. Tintin, finds himself alone in his quest, yet he never entertains the idea that his friend is dead. Later, the monk sees another vision and it becomes clear that Chang is indeed alive.

The plot is, thus, sufficiently complex to be called a graphic novel. We see Tintin's love for his friend. We see his faith in his intuitions. We feel awed by Haddock's unselfish help. We have Snow's fight between right and wrong. We see the power of spirituality. However, the story lacks a subplot. It is rather straightforward despite its complexities. The monastery episode and Snowy's dilemma can be called a half-hearted subplot. This is where Tintin In Tibet fails to live up to the expectations of a graphic novel. However, the complex plot fills the void that the absence of a subplot created.

Hergé reached a particularly traumatic period in his life and suffered a mental breakdown when he was about to create Tintin In Tibet. In 1956, he realised that he had fallen out of love with his wife Germaine, whom he had married in 1932, and by 1958, he and Fanny Vlamincq, a colourist at Studios Hergé twenty-eight years his junior, had developed a deep mutual attraction.

During this period, Hergé had recurrent nightmares where he faced images of what he described as "the beauty and cruelty of white"—visions of white and snow that he could not explain. As he later told Sadoul:

"At the time, I was going through a time of real crisis and my dreams were nearly always white dreams. And they were extremely distressing. I took note of them and remember one where I was in a kind of tower made up of a series of ramps. Dead leaves were falling and covering everything. At a particular moment, in an immaculately white alcove, a white skeleton appeared that tried to catch me. And then instantly everything around me became white." It is but natural for, that the next Tintin adventure would feature inward struggles rather than outward one. This made Tintin In Tibet a comics that is layered and profound. Thus it would not be an over estimation if Tintin In Tibet is regarded as a graphic novel.